

ALAB MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 7, 2011

Members and Alternates Present: Dee Lacey, Tom Ikeda, Bill Struble, Dick Nock, Jean-Pierre Wolff, Eric Michielssen, R. Don Warden, Joy Fitzhugh, Noah Small, Lisen Bonnier, Charles Pritchard, David Pruitt, Brenda Ouwerkerk, Mary Bianchi

Absent Members: Mark Pearce, Richard Hawley, Richard Quandt, Neil Roberts

Guests Present: Larry Werner- North Coast Engineering; Renee Robins and Clare Hodgkin -Sun Power; Olivia Gonzalez, Grower-Shipper; Supervisor James Patterson – District 5

Staff: Lynda Auchinachie and Marty Settevendemie, Agriculture Department; Warren Hoag, County Department of Planning and Building (DP&B).

1. **Call to Order:** 6:07 PM. Quorum Present. Mr. Settevendemie introduced himself as the new Agricultural Commissioner. Marty indicated he was looking forward to working collaboratively with ALAB members.
2. **Open Comment:** Charles Pritchard shared information regarding the North County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) stakeholders' meeting that was held on February 24, 2011. Charles indicated the County of San Luis Obispo and the City of Paso Robles are developing a multiple species habitat conservation program with a goal of eventually preparing an HCP in support of federal and state permits for take of Covered Species. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game are assisting with the effort. A public scoping meeting will be held March 30, 2011, at 6 PM at the Paso Robles City Hall. (See 2a below for continued open comment). ALAB members indicated they were not interested in directly participating in the effort, however, Chuck indicated he would keep the group informed as he will be representing the Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District .
3. **Agency Reports & Member Announcements/Reports:**
 - Brenda Ouwerkerk provided the departmental update handout (see attached), ALAB meeting calendar and updated ALAB contact information. The departmental update handout has a new feature that was introduced during Item 6.
 - Joy Fitzhugh provided information regarding the Farm Bureau's coordinated effort to transport interested parties to the March 17, 2011 Regional Water Quality Control Board meeting in Watsonville. The meeting will be focused on the March 2, 2011, Draft Ag Order. See Item 7.
 - Marty Settevendemie updated ALAB members on the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter infestation in the City of San Luis Obispo. Marty reported the eradication project has been initiated. A public meeting was held with approximately 20 residents in attendance as well as some of the local wine grape growers. The vast majority of the residents were accepting of the treatment program. A total of 75 properties will be treated. To date, about 75% of the applications have been applied. Once the applications are completed, parasitic wasps will be released as a follow up.
 - Chair Lacy indicated that the department has done a good job with the project and that the effort has been viewed very positively by both the public and the industry.
 - Lisen Bonnier inquired about the potential impact the treatment may have on bees. Marty responded that blooming plants are not treated including citrus. Treating dormant trees and plants mitigates impacts to bees. Label requirements are followed.
 - Jean-Pierre Wolff indicates mites may be affecting the bee colonies not just pesticides.
- 2a. **Open Comment Continued:** Sun Power representatives Larry Werner, North Coast Engineering, Renee Robin, Director of Permitting, and Clare Hodgkins introduced themselves to ALAB members

and indicated they would like feedback from the group. Renee indicated Sun Power recently obtained approval from the Planning Commission for their proposed 250 megawatt solar photovoltaic project located on the Carissa Plain. Renee provided a colorful handout highlighting various components of the project. Renee indicated the project will cover approximately 1,600 acres of land and that mitigation for the loss of both biological and agricultural resources was part of the project approval. Renee indicated that the company is a solar energy company and will not be going into the business of agriculture. Renee was interested in feedback regarding compatibility of ongoing agricultural activities with permanent habitat conservation. Renee also indicated the land will no longer be overgrazed and proper management practices will be in place for utilizing sheep and goats on an occasional basis for weed management within the array area. Renee provided contact information for ALAB members to provide feedback.

4. Previous Minutes:

MOTION: Approve minutes: **Motion – Tom Ikeda. 2nd – Charles Pritchard. Approved: Unanimous. Abstentions: none.**

5. Williamson Act Program Update (Warren Hoag, DP&B)

- Warren Hoag provided background on the Williamson Act (WA) program that allows counties and landowners to voluntarily enter into 10 or 20 year rolling contracts restricting land to agricultural and open space uses in return for being assessed for property tax purposed at a rate based on actual use rather than potential market value. Historically the state has paid our county about \$1 million in annual subventions. Acreage breakdown: 37% of all county land is under WA contracts (793,414 acres out of 2,126,000 acres) and 57% of AG-zoned land.
- Subvention funding issues continue. County is only anticipating about \$290,000 in subvention funding for 2010-2011 budget year. The County continues to absorb the loss to the general fund of the reduced subvention funding.
- In October, 2010, the State Legislature passed SB 863 to provide an alternative means of off-setting the loss of subvention funding. This legislation allows counties to recoup a significant portion of their actual foregone property tax revenue through shortening contracts by one or two years and recapturing 10% of the property tax savings. A preliminary rough estimate is that SLO County could receive as much as \$1 million per year in revenue from this program. SLO County has not yet implemented the program but will consider doing so beginning in 2012.
- The Governor's 2011-2012 budget proposes to virtually eliminate all subvention payments in the proposed state budget. On February 1, 2011, the Board of Supervisors (BOS) chairman sent a letter to the State Legislature expressing strong opposition to the Governor's proposal.
- As discussed in 2010, options for dealing with the loss of subvention funding includes: Continue to backfill the subvention loss from other funding sources; implement SB 863; stop accepting new application; and/or issue county-initiated notices of nonrenewal. It is anticipated that the BOS will consider these issues in August 2011.
- Dick Nock questioned how much property taxes might increase with implementation of SB 863. Warren Hoag indicated there would be an 18% increase for diversified crops and a 24% increase for grazing lands. Dick Nock suggested that now may be the time to stop accepting new contracts. ALAB members will discuss options as more information is available.

6. ALAB Effectiveness (Dee Lacey, Chair)

- Chair Lacey introduced the item by asking how ALAB could be more effective in the planning process. Brenda Ouwerkerk reintroduced the departmental handout that provides a monthly summary of recent events, upcoming calendar items and a new feature that provides a

summary of Planning Department projects. Brenda indicated she is working directly with her counterpart in the DP&B, Kami Griffin. Kami has agreed to provide excerpts from her monthly summary to the BOS members regarding planning efforts.

- ALAB members discussed the importance of the timing of input and the desire for their comments to be heard. There was the recognition that commenting early and often is the most effective way to influence the final outcome. The agricultural grading effort was put forth as an example of successful input.
- ALAB members also discussed the importance of disseminating the information provided at the ALAB meeting to their member groups. ALAB members and member groups could contact Chair Lacey to request items of interest be agendaized for discussion.
- Joy Fitzhugh indicated she would like to see Climate Action Plan stripped out of Land Use and Circulation Element update process.

7. Regional Water Quality Control Board's Ag Order, (Joy Fitzhugh, Farm Bureau)

- Chair Lacey introduced a comment letter (see agenda attachment) prepared by the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC). The letter summarized concerns regarding the California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), Central Coast Region, Draft Ag Order. Specifically, the letter addressed concerns with Tier 1 requirements. Chair Lacey indicated that a revised Draft Ag Order was released on March 2, 2011, and that the WRAC letter addressed concerns associated with the November 19, 2010 Draft Ag Order only.
- Joy Fitzhugh indicated the March 2, 2011, Draft Ag Order had several revisions associated with Tier 2 and 3 requirements and that there was not enough time for all stakeholders to adequately review and provide comment by the March 17, 2011, hearing date before the RWQCB. Joy provided a hand out of an analysis of the March 2, 2011, Draft Ag Order prepared by Kirk Schmidt, Executive Director of Central Coast Water Quality Preservation Inc. Joy also indicated that the WRAC letter provided important input regarding Tier 1 concerns; however, the March 2, 2011, revisions could significantly impact Tier 2 and 3 growers.
- ALAB members discussed the concerns raised by WRAC about the Draft Ag Order and indicated they supported WRAC's comments regarding Tier 1 requirements. ALAB members also expressed concerns regarding the inability to adequately review and comment on the March 2, 2011, Draft Ag Order.

Motion – Prepare a letter of support for the WRAC letter identifying concerns relative to Tier 1 requirements. Request that the Board of Supervisors prepare a letter indicating concern over the short time period to review and comment on the March 2, 2011, Draft Ag Order and request that the March 2, 2011, Draft Ag order be re-circulated to allow all stakeholders adequate time to review and comment. The requested letter should be agendaized for the March 15, 2011 hearing date. **Motion:** Don Warden.

Second: Charles Pritchard. **Approved: unanimous Opposed: none**

8. Upcoming Meeting: April 4, 2011. 6 PM

Future Agenda Items: None identified.

Meeting adjourned: 8:00 PM. Respectfully submitted by Lynda Auchinachie, County Agriculture Department.